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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR EIKENBERRY AND GOVERNOR AMIN DISCUSS
THE CHALLENGE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN FARAH PROVINCE

Classified By: Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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11. (C) SUMMARY: An animated Governor Roohul Amin of Farah told Ambassador Eikenberry on May 30 that the situation in his province is improving for ordinary citizens as a result of his efforts to reduce corruption and fight crime, even though Taliban activity is increasing. Under intense pressure because of his reform efforts, Amin is highly critical of both the Government and Parliament but continues to believe President Karzai himself is being misled and ill-served by people around him. Given Amin's experiences, he is skeptical of proposals to channel more international funds through the Afghan government, including via the National Solidarity Program (NSP). Amin has clear development priorities for his province and appreciates the help he receives on them from the U.S.-led PRT. He feels, however, shortchanged by what he sees as the modest commitment of U.S. resource to his poor, insecure province, compared to U.S. investment in the East and South. End Summary.

Why Get Involved?

12. (U) The Ambassador's first question, namely why Amin with his strong NGO credentials agreed to enter government service, immediately got to the theme that dominated the evening) the difference a good person can make but the risks and difficulties such a person faces, including from the government itself. The Governor noted that he was recruited by Jelani Popal, Director of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), and had to overcome stiff resistance to his taking on the job from his entire family, with the exception of his politically minded son (now at Williams College) and his brother.

13. (SBU) In the 13 months he has held the job, Governor Amin has come to question why good people) he insists there are many) get so little support, while those pursuing nefarious or self-serving agendas manage to thrive. He criticizes both his own government and members of Parliament for not always having the best interests of the country in mind. He continues, however, to hold off on direct criticism of President Karzai, complaining instead of a closed circle around the President who block the flow of accurate information (Amin mentioned how difficult it is for him to get an appointment with the President). He noted in passing a lack of support from such Farah natives in the Palace as Deputy National Security Advisor Spinzada and Presidential Advisor (and former Helmand Governor) Wafa. At one point, when he was feeling under particular pressure to backtrack on anti-crime and corruption steps, Amin even composed a letter of resignation. In the end, he decided to hold off for the sake of what he characterized as Afghanistan's only chance for democracy. If that chance is squandered, he asked

himself, &What will life be like for my children?8 So for now, he turns a deaf ear to rumors that the Iranians may try to poison him or that the Taliban have dispatched a suicide bomber to remove him and the provincial director of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) from the scene.

Challenges to Good Governance

14. (SBU) If security is the number one &service8 that citizens want from their government, Governor Amin must overcome enormous hurdles to deliver it. He estimates the Taliban force within the province to number between 300-600, with about 10 percent made up of foreign fighters. Most roam from village to village rather than maintaining a fixed presence. The most dangerous of their leadership is former Guantanamo detainee Mullah Sultan. Amin mentioned another commander, Haji Anwar, as also particularly troublesome and suggested the man has links to Iranian intelligence. Three of Farah's 12 districts (including Delaram) are under strong Taliban influence, with Bala Baluk topping the list. Three other districts) Gostestan, Bakva and Delaram) present serious but more intermittent problems.

15. (SBU) Against this, the Government has a force of 600 Afghan National Army (ANA) and about 1200 Afghan National Police (ANP) in Farah Province. Amin has high praise for the ANA but regrets Chief of General Staff Bismullah Khan's turn-down of his request that MOD deploy its forces in smaller units in more locations to back up the police, Khan arguing that his forces would lose their ability to maneuver if dispersed as small units. The Governor largely discounts

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the police, given their strong tribal and family links to malefactors. He also suggested many are drug addicts. He appreciates the help lent by international forces, but wants to see more patrolling. Amin faults the Italians on this score but says he has wrung a commitment from the newly arrived local Italian commander to get out on the roads. The Governor had high praise for a recent Special Forces operation that eliminated six insurgent commanders and said he would like to see more such actions targeting the Taliban leadership in the province. At the same time, he expressed concern with what he believes to be misplaced reliance at times by international military forces on unreliable Afghan informers who may be attempting to use international forces to serve their private agendas, including against local enemies. The Governor repeated his request for the stationing of two attack helicopters in Farah, arguing that such assets would be more effective than fixed-wing aircraft in surgically eliminating insurgents while minimizing civilian casualties.

16. (SBU) Amin insisted most Afghans hate the Taliban, who in Farah oppose education, impose their own taxes, demand food and reportedly have even started demanding a levy of one suicide bomber per village. The problem, as he sees it, is the absence of an Afghan government presence in wide areas, feeding the feeling of vulnerability on the part of the population. The situation is exacerbated, he argued, when internationals suggest the insurgents are getting stronger, since this reinforces people's tendency to fear a return of the Taliban and so withhold support from the government. The insurgents themselves press this impression home with their intimidation tactics. In one instance cited by the Governor, a moderate mullah who recited prayers at the funeral of a policeman was later beaten and killed by the Taliban.

17. (SBU) Another huge challenge is corruption, which he labeled &the biggest and most dangerous8 concern to him. He cited the case of the head of the provincial Red Crescent Society, against whom the NDS chief brought evidence of having sold off donated humanitarian assistance to a local shopkeeper for profit. Amin said he came under tremendous pressure to release the man, including from the prominent and

politically well connected head of the national Red Crescent Society. He anticipates that money will change hands to ensure the individual (since sentenced to 10 years in prison) is released on appeal. In another instance, the Governor encountered serious obstacles to taking action against a local ANP commander involved in kidnapping and murder. While he again in the end was able to take action and so significantly reduce kidnappings, Amin said he has had to stand up to intense pressure and incur great personal risk for doing so.

Development: More Resources and Greater Flexibility Needed

18. (U) Governor Amin is clear on what he thinks his province does and does not need. Top on his wish list is the Bakshaba dam, which would irrigate 200,000 additional hectares of agricultural land but is opposed by the Iranians (who want the water for themselves). Most other needs are also agriculture-related) paved roads to bring goods safely to market, cold storage facilities, small processing facilities, additional irrigation canals. The Governor is also a big believer in spreading electrification, pointing out the impact television could have on women from conservative families who are confined to the home. More bridges across the Farah River that bisects the province (there are currently only two, and the PRT is building a third) are also important. Amin is very much against distribution of humanitarian assistance in Farah, arguing that it makes people there lazy and unwilling to do what is necessary to feed themselves. They should also clean their own canals and do basic repairs on the roads. He cautioned against seeing the National Solidarity Program as a panacea, at least in places like Farah, where) he claims) the Taliban press locals to ask for projects and then try to impose a tax of up to 50 percent. He also expressed qualms about development money being channeled through GIROA, given the difficulty of getting funds to flow from the center to the periphery. He noted one case in which the President gave instructions for a project to be funded, but 14 months later the money has yet to arrive. Working projects through the PRT, he said, is more dependable, if encumbered by paperwork. He would, however, like to see the PRT able to respond more quickly and flexibly to emerging needs. Most of all, though, he would like to see the U.S. making available to Farah the same level of resources he sees us putting into

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Afghanistan, East and South.

19. (SBU) Comment: The case of Governor Amin says much about the challenges we face on the governance front. While we all recognize the critical importance of good governance, even having a competent, honest and energetic individual in place does not necessarily translate to decisive success. This is the case not least of all because of the lack of support provided by GIROA itself. This means that the assistance that we provide) material and personnel, including quite importantly additional armed forces) becomes that more valuable. It is gratifying that the Governor, despite his frustrations, feels he has made some progress in addressing people's needs by his moves against criminality and corruption. But with the summer fighting season just getting underway and the likely spillover into Farah from the increased pressure to be put on neighboring Helmand, the Governor and his province face difficult days ahead.

EIKENBERRY